

IN THE CLAIMS

The following is a listing of the claims of the present application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for use in a distributed data network wherein a user may request and receive content from one or more entities in the distributed data network, the method comprising the steps of:

providing one or more mechanisms for enabling at least one of the user and one or more of the entities to control which entities in the distributed data network have access to information generated in association with the user's activity on the distributed data network, wherein the user specifies at least one role and, based on the created role, at least one profile for the user is maintained by one or more of the entities in the form of information inserted into the profile by one or more of the entities, the information representing the user's activity on the distributed data network with respect to the one or more entities that inserted the information, such that profile maintenance is substantially transparent to the user; and

customizing content to be received by the user in accordance with at least a portion of the information in the user profile;

wherein the step of providing the one or more control mechanisms for the user comprises the step of enabling the user to specify two or more roles within which the user may perform activities on the distributed data network, wherein the two or more roles have two or more profiles respectively associated therewith, and wherein the two or more profiles are substantially unlinkable.

2. through 4. (Canceled).

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4 1, wherein the substantial unlinkability of the profiles substantially prevents an entity from learning about the user's activity at another entity, when the user conducts activities at the different entities in the different roles.

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 2 1, wherein the roles are specified in accordance with at least one dedicated server located in the distributed data network.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the one or more entities are

merchants operating on the distributed data network.

8. (Currently Amended) ~~The method of claim 1;~~ A method for use in a distributed data network wherein a user may request and receive content from one or more entities in the distributed data network, the method comprising the steps of:

providing one or more mechanisms for enabling at least one of the user and one or more of the entities to control which entities in the distributed data network have access to information generated in association with the user's activity on the distributed data network, wherein the user specifies at least one role and, based on the created role, at least one profile for the user is maintained by one or more of the entities in the form of information inserted into the profile by one or more of the entities, the information representing the user's activity on the distributed data network with respect to the one or more entities that inserted the information, such that profile maintenance is substantially transparent to the user; and

customizing content to be received by the user in accordance with at least a portion of the information in the user profile;

wherein the step of providing the one or more control mechanisms for the one or more entities comprises the step of enabling the one or more entities to specify which other entities are able to access information that the one or more entities learned in association with the user conducting activities with the one or more entities.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, further wherein the one or more entities are enabled to specify which other entities are able to access information derived from original information that the one or more entities learned in association with the user conducting activities with the one or more entities.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the one or more entities are enabled to specify a degree of information derivation in accordance with which other entities may be able to access the information.

11. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the one or more entities are enabled to group

the other entities into one or more classes wherein each class has a degree of information derivation associated therewith.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more entities access the information in accordance with one or more dedicated databases located in the distributed data network.

13. (Currently Amended) A method for use in accordance with at least one server in a distributed data network wherein a user may request and receive content from one or more entities in the distributed data network, the method comprising the steps of:

the at least one server maintaining two or more user-specified policies respectively associated with two or more roles within which the user may perform activities on the distributed data network; and

the at least one server issuing access credentials associated with the user-specified policies to one or more entities that seek to access information generated in association with the user's activity on the distributed data network so as to customize content to be received by the user in accordance with at least a portion of the accessible information.

14. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the access credentials comprise rights by which the entity may access the information.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the access rights comprise at least one of information read rights, information insert rights and information delete rights.

16. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the access credentials further comprise an identifier of the entity to which the access credentials are being issued.

17. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the access credentials further comprise an expiration time specifying a duration of the access rights.

18. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the access credentials further comprise a digital signature on the access credentials.

19. (Original) The method of claim 18, wherein the access credentials further comprise a public key matching a private key by which the access credentials have been digitally signed.

20. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the maintaining step further comprises prompting the user to specify a new role or an existing role within which the user may perform activities on the distributed data network

21. (Original) A method for use in accordance with one or more databases in a distributed data network wherein a user may request and receive content from one or more entities in the distributed data network, the method comprising the steps of:

storing information that the one or more entities learn in association with the user conducting activities with the one or more entities; and

enabling the one or more entities to specify which other entities are able to access the stored information so as to customize content to be received by the user in accordance with at least a portion of the accessible information.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein the information that the one or more entities learn in association with the user conducting activities with the one or more entities comprises at least one of original information and information derived from the original information.

23. (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein the enabling step further comprises enabling the one or more entities to specify one or more taint classes for portions of the stored information.

24. (Original) The method of claim 23, wherein a given taint class corresponds to an affinity an entity has to collaborate with entities in the given taint class.

25. (Original) The method of claim 23, wherein at least portions of the information are

respectively stored as records, wherein each record has stored in association therewith a data structure comprising at least one of an accumulated taint strength, a set of taint classes, and pointers to one or more original records from which this record was derived.

26. (Original) The method of claim 25, wherein an entity is not permitted to read a record derived from an original record if the entity is not a member of a specified taint class and there is a path of a given length or less from the derived record to the original record.

27. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of applying a scoring function to portions of the stored information to which a given entity has access.

28. (Original) The method of claim 27, wherein results of the scoring function indicate the relevance of the portions of the stored information to one or more content customization decisions to be made by the given entity.

29. (Original) Apparatus for use in a distributed data network wherein a user may request and receive content from one or more entities in the distributed data network, the apparatus comprising:

at least one processor operative to: (i) maintain two or more user-specified policies respectively associated with two or more roles within which the user may perform activities on the distributed data network; and (ii) issue access credentials associated with the user-specified policies to one or more entities that seek to access information generated in association with the user's activity on the distributed data network so as to customize content to be received by the user in accordance with at least a portion of the accessible information.

30. (Original) The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the access credentials comprise rights by which the entity may access the information.

31. through 36. (Canceled).

37. (Original) Apparatus for use in a distributed data network wherein a user may request and receive content from one or more entities in the distributed data network, the apparatus comprising:

at least one processor operative to: (i) store information that the one or more entities learn in association with the user conducting activities with the one or more entities; and (ii) enable the one or more entities to specify which other entities are able to access the stored information so as to customize content to be received by the user in accordance with at least a portion of the accessible information.

38. through 51. (Canceled).